

AN MTA PUBLISHING CHALLENGE:
A TEXTBOOK CONCEPT AND PROSPECTS

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Summary

Each year the customary proceedings are published for distribution following the annual Military Testing Association (MTA) Conference. Only a modest amount of editing and transition discussion among subject-matter sections and papers are practical since the proceedings conform to a topical program plan and size. With a growing diversity of material found within topical areas and across the proceedings, there is an immediate challenge to edit selected material to show a wider scientific application with an integrated structure for key subject-matter sections.

A textbook plan, as a response to this challenge, is in progress to work toward a definitive volume dealing with military personnel assessment research (1958-1983), paralleling reporting activities through 25 years of MTA programs. Several characteristics will make an MTA text noteworthy, largely because most presentations to be drawn on are well done and currently original in view of the reported topics. Major sections will describe interservice and international research priorities, military and related research and program management results, mutual and dissimilar problems and solutions, and present a critical analysis of future directions.

The growing scope and quality of MTA participation indicate there is a continuing need to report the proceedings as efficiently and professionally as possible. Certain implications from deliberations of the MTA Publishing Review Group can furnish advisory assistance for innovative MTA publication practices as well as preparing a scholarly foundation for editing one or more longitudinal texts.

INTRODUCTION

Publication of annual proceedings is and has been a strong motivation to produce MTA papers and presentations. The sharing of professional and technical experiences gives the participants a ready audience to propose,

¹The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Army Research Institute or the Department of the Army.

review and critique research or studies in a working atmosphere. After 23 years MTA has extended its invitation and participation to annually attract nearly 300 or more military and civilians to explore current topics having specific and general interest in the field of personnel assessment psychology. Coordination responsibility to plan an annual conference, direct a program, and collect the material to publish the proceedings is, to say the least, a formidable yet rewarding challenge.

In the early years of MTA these gatherings were arranged with more of the atmosphere of a college class reunion. It was never expected then that our neat little stack of papers and banquet speech would signal a trend toward a two volume proceedings of 1095 pages, our Canadian conference produced last year (MTA, 1980) nor the 995 pages the US Navy host published the year before (MTA, 1979). A discussion late this summer (Birdsall, 1981) helped estimate, for example, the contrasting length of proceedings for the second annual MTA Conference (1960) which was about 84 pages. With a publication trend that seems to encourage a rather large volume or volumes, we should seriously begin to think through the various publication choices that can guide the development of particular features regarding quantity and quality control in what is selected for MTA format and content.

Publication decisions affecting the length of MTA Proceedings or structure of articles must be identified so that greater advantage may be taken of the rather prolific reporting achieved each year. Where the proceedings furnish an opportunity to deliver papers or present programs, the emphasis is largely on working level actions instead of fully examined and assimilated technical products. There are several other possible ways proceedings might vary in format and content arrangements depending on the objectives selected. As minimal manuscript guidance this year our MTA (1981) host, the Army Research Institute, has for the first time distributed "instructions to authors for MTA manuscripts." A step taken thereby confirming that if we need to structure manuscripts, perhaps due regard for proceedings composition has become of timely concern also.

Should any proposed alternatives indicate inherent constraints in publishing proceedings, then it would seem reasonable to ask: Could there be other publications conceived in MTA and published through MTA or independently? And I would say categorically, another abstracting approach alone would be unacceptable since the article content could not usually be available through a selective retrieval system.

Certain constraints are natural, I feel, with any organizational proceedings. First, when an open call for papers is announced the program size and eventually plan for topical order are dependent on nominal title, topics and degree of paper or panel technical preparation and documentation. Secondly, only a modest amount of editing and transition discussion will be practical to bring papers together more coherently within topical areas and when areas or sections are put in a given program order.

As the diversity of material has increased even in subject-matter sections and across the proceedings, an immediate challenge is perceived to have the proceedings or some alternative derived from proceedings selectively edited to offer a more generalized application in the field of psychology. An integrated structure of key topical areas using independently composed articles or chapters is conceivable with the synthesizing effect of introductory and transitional comments. An attempt to edit a group of papers simply taken from a sample of MTA Proceedings which would include largely the initial papers does not achieve the concept I have in mind, and would most likely be of limited interest beyond the military personnel and training situations. Program scope and material diversity are not in and of themselves handicaps. But the great bulk of material assembled by program sequence can serve most often only as an authentic history and technical reference for participants and colleagues normally familiar with the purpose of the subject-matter content.

Making the effort to see beyond the cumulative proceedings annually inspired under the obvious pressure of on-going operational requirements, does call for an altered perspective, if not a state of consciousness. This adjustment is needed to decide what publication alternative would appear new, instructive, and distill the principal technical trends observed through MTA Conferences. An alternative concept has gradually emerged, which is being refined, that suggests a textbook structure to describe military personnel research from the perspective of MTA experiences and then generalize to academic and other settings.

A TEXTBOOK PLAN

The MTA Publishing Review Group was designated following the 21st Conference and was the result of an Ad Hoc committee created to explore the development of a publication, preferable a textbook in hardcover (MTA, 1979). Our first objective, I determined as appointed chairman, was try to mold a concept which would document the major professional contributions contained in the proceedings of previous conferences. At the 22nd Conference in Toronto a plan of action (1980) was presented including a global definition of the task and tentative text outline with basic author guidelines. This committee plan was the basis for selecting prospective editors to further develop the text concept and help revise the preliminary content outline. Along with the tentative outline certain crucial milestones were projected to develop article or chapter outlines for the subject-matter areas or major textbook sections.

A textbook plan is being carried out where the book sections are defined by co-editors who obtain the interested authors, and we all industriously strive to put flesh on a definitive volume dealing with military personnel assessment research (1958-1983) paralleling the MTA programs through 25 years of reporting activities. Four major sections are identified in the text outline: Occupational Analysis and Research, Personnel Measurement and Evaluation, Training Methods and Programs, and Organizational Assessment and Technology. Two optional sections were identified to add an introductory MTA background perspective and a concluding

summary of military personnel research utility and future development. To date our endeavor, not unlike the proceedings in part, has impressed us also with the grave magnitude of bringing so much digested material into one manageable book that would adequately treat these sections of complex subject-matter.

An MTA text should be noteworthy because of several characteristics derived from the background of the organization and proceedings. The material presented in almost every instance is well done since it describes the direct experience of individuals and organizations, candidly confronting their research and study problems before conclusions and recommendations are rationalized to fit any inevitable operational compromises or changes in product functions. Of course this written material may profit from some editing, yet a raw originality is evident and the current importance of the reported topics increases their technical relevance. From the MTA organizational affiliations an atmosphere is encouraged to deliver information having a realistic problem solving thrust, rather than exploiting findings which may or may not guarantee rigorous application due to overly elegant technical conditions and logistical support.

Although there is a diversity of material, strong interest groups have tended to become visible and establish communication to delineate prevailing issues. So that there are distinctive groups of interest in spite of the problem of sequencing the proceedings material in the most reasonable order. It is out of this familiarity participants have with so many content areas and their timely individual technical products that new articles or chapters can develop to show a longitudinal analysis of military personnel research and future requirements. Editorial initiative and author discipline are the prime ingredients to translate our plan into a cohesive arrangement of selectively reviewed material extracting the best proceedings highlights with a synthesis of critically discussed MTA contributions and their wider scientific application.

During the 21st MTA Conference (1979) our efforts were spent on just learning whether enough Steering Committee members would have an interest in the textbook concept to justify development of a plan for publication. The notion of publishing something in addition to the proceedings was and is supported, but molding an editorial board to breathe life into this concept took most of the year before the 22nd Conference (1980). And in fact a designated board of editors and an acceptable book prospectus were not prepared in depth until after several good working sessions as recorded in the closing minutes of the 1980 Steering Committee meeting. Draft working papers had been prepared for Steering Committee review before the conference and a survey conducted to focus on the decision points needing thorough discussion and agreement. Fortunately, during the brief time available the book concept was revised, the editorial board and Publishing Review Group confirmed, the preliminary milestone dates selected, and the Steering Committee approval given to circulate our prospectus to publishers.

The 1981 Conference will attend to reviewing the updated status of the editorial board as to sections or subject-matter areas, outlining details, and the commitment received from prospective authors. Again, the first step is to see where we are in reaching better definition of our task ahead during this conference and the coming year. Needless to say, the agreement on new milestones must decidedly be an urgent part of our agenda here to assure that there is ample productivity to write and edit the planned sequences of articles or chapters.

Also this year after contacting a relatively respectable number of prospective publishers, it has been advised that a text, or series of texts optimistically suggested, clarify features that are distinctively promoted by the MTA programs. Major book sections and topical areas can describe interservice and international research priorities from the military and related research experiences while reviewing the impact on program management results. Mutual and dissimilar problems and solutions will permit a contrast of research systems and functions and explain the differences observed. A critical analysis of what we did, currently do, and intend to do in future activities will present a definitive military personnel research record and verify the effective continuity achieved in the reported proceedings.

REPORTING AND PUBLISHING

While a singular effort is planned to attain the textbook publishing objective, it is not meant in anyway to detract from the annual reporting of the MTA proceedings. Reporting of the papers and programs given each year lends both incentive and feedback in specific areas at this working-level conference to expand our military and professional skills (Ellis, 1972). The content of the proceedings in a sense has to capture the concurrent task requirements of each participating individual and organization where personnel problems are assigned for investigation. Publishing in my discussion, then, is an alternative means by which the Military Testing Association can review and evaluate its contribution to the long-term promotion of military and professional personnel assessment activities (Abramson, Tittle, & Cohen, 1979).

As was mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the scope of MTA and the enduring quality of participation attract deserved attention in regard to their prodigious capacity for communication and interaction. Membership is voluntary from year to year but indicates persisting work orientations, which act as vehicles to expand presentations without necessarily obtaining the priority of issues to secure the most tangible benefits. Numerous variables operate to cause the proceedings to be affected by contemporary problems that do not always encourage authors to find a perspective to make their articles integrate past and future circumstances. In reporting the proceedings, I think that most program chairpersons would

agree, it was extremely difficult to anticipate and organize presentations to expressly group and sequence papers by anything like a tightly structured set of subject or topical categories.

In spite of constraints imposed by the reporting format, there are the fundamental criteria of efficiency and professionalism which should recommend exploring potential modifications in publication of the MTA Proceedings. I would like to solve these questions of what and how to immortalize in print, however there is more to deriving the solutions than merely setting up new publication aims. Decisions to change the size, use print or direct microfilm, or design edited articles will require, perhaps, at least a new concept of what our proceedings should aspire to. To stimulate this adjustment toward positive reporting changes, the textbook plan for publication continues to stimulate questions about content, style, and size which are answerable only in reference to our library of proceedings and its relationship to the field of personnel assessment psychology.

When the MTA Publishing Review Group has finished discussions with the Steering Committee and completes its working agenda assignments, these deliberations may well have implications generally for MTA publication practices. Certainly wherever the textbook concept experience takes us, innovative planning results can furnish advisory assistance to conceive of new program management techniques in guiding suggested structural changes in the proceedings. Some members of MTA may not see any reason in modifying the proceedings as a key organization activity. Yet it is because of the growing mass of proceedings information that a textbook concept has triggered the collective imagination. Both the prospect of digesting the best of MTA and that of having a commercial text appealing to a larger domain of personnel research and assessment users can precede a new phase of MTA growth, professional identity and publication.

Whenever such an organizational challenge is detected and accepted, there may follow a few unavoidable consequences. Obviously, one consequence may cause a constructive difference in MTA program content and related membership. Another is to verify a realistic and scholarly foundation from which the editing of a military personnel research text follows as an important product, signifying a functionally sound and continuous basis for our affiliation. And still another is that a longitudinal review of the organization is invited where its principal reporting and publishing products are examined.

Our committee was tasked to develop a textbook plan and soon discovered that we had to inventory and review the history and purpose of MTA Proceedings. Being a new publication group we have attempted to design a longitudinal appreciation and critique of the proceedings to create a new type of document. It has been necessary to better understand this organization and analyze the potential risks in producing a marketable

textbook. Many details remain before our plan will finally unleash the designated organizational and professional resources to publish one or more texts after the 1983 Conference. It is felt that no matter what our final published product is, the prospects are highly favorable we shall have progressively modified MTA's publishing concepts, products and organizational objectives.

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